

A regional picture of hedgehogs

Conservation measures are often funded and organised at the level of Government Office Regions, twelve administrative areas that divide up the UK. These give a more detailed picture of population sizes at a regional scale but are still large enough to have sufficient records that we can be confident of the results.

When hedgehogs are looked at, the most striking difference between last year and this is the fall in numbers apparent in the Eastern and North West regions (Figure 5). The low numbers recorded in these regions reflect both a low proportion of 'positive' sites – those at which hedgehogs were recorded – and fewer hedgehogs visiting these sites. If only positive sites are considered, sites in the south of England and West Midlands had the highest average number of hedgehogs over the survey period (about seven). Those in the Eastern and North West regions, in contrast, only had an average of four.

It remains unclear though whether the difference is because numbers are declining or because they



simply reflect a more typical spring after a particularly good one last year. Only by collecting data year-on-year and identifying trends can we begin to answer this and other questions about our urban neighbours.

Thank you!

Many thanks for taking part in *Living with Mammals* this year: its success is due wholly to the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers involved. Thank you too, to everyone who sent in photographs, including Colin Mackenzie, Vera Rhodes and P. Bull, whose pictures are included here.

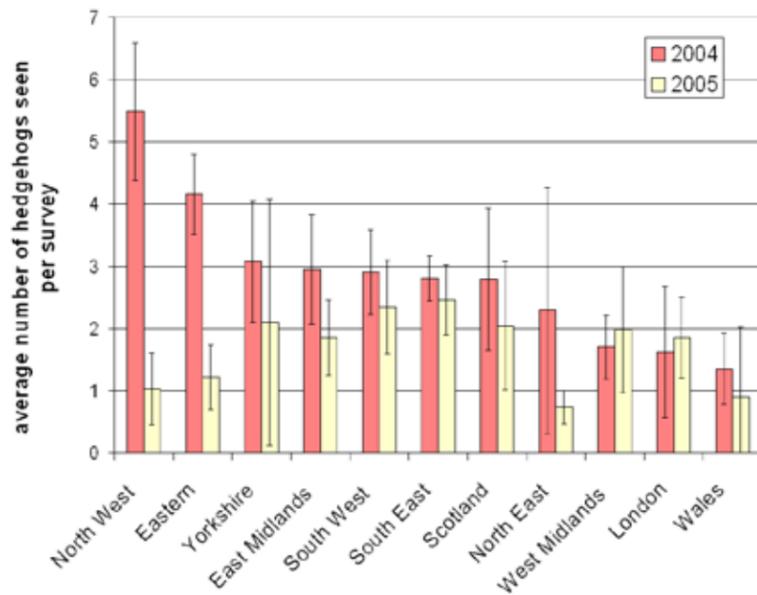


Figure 5 The average number of hedgehogs recorded over the survey period in different regions of the UK. (The maximum number seen each week was added up over the total number of survey weeks and the average for all the sites within a region calculated.)



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Living with Mammals Survey Update 2005



LIVING WITH MAMMALS SURVEY

DECEMBER 2005

In 2005, *Living with Mammals* clocked up over a year of collective observation time, and recorded sightings and signs of almost 30 mammal species. Over 700 volunteers took part in this, the third year of the survey, and their efforts represent a huge achievement. Your work, along with that of many thousands of others in the Tracking Mammals Partnership, is essential to the UK *Biodiversity Action Plan* (BAP) and is informing conservation policies at the highest level.



Figure 1 The distribution of survey sites in 2005.



Colin Mackenzie

About two thirds of those who took part this year were veterans of the survey from previous years, and over 300 volunteers have taken part each year since the survey began in 2003. The experience built-up by these volunteers makes a huge contribution to the success of the survey and we hope that new recruits this year continue to lend their expertise.

Survey coverage

Survey sites in 2005 stretched the length of the UK (Figure 1). Twenty-nine species or groups of species (such as bats) were reported, including 14 Species of Conservation Concern (SoCC), shown in the table below. These species are designated SoCCs on a number of criteria such as Red List status, international importance, and decline, and are species that, where possible, should be monitored. They include hedgehog, shrews, our native red and roe deer, fallow deer and badger.

Species of Conservation Concern	Number of sites
Bat species	369
Hedgehog	323
Badger	118
Shrew species	76
Brown hare	39
Weasel	27
Stoat	26
Red squirrel	9
Otter	6
Hazel dormouse	5
Water vole	2
Polecat	2
Pine marten	2
Seal	1

Table 1 The number of sites recording Species of Conservation Concern. Those highlighted in pink are Priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

SoCCs were recorded at 78 percent of sites (544) and highlight the importance of the urban environment in the context of conservation. One of these, the pine marten, is Britain's second rarest carnivore (after the wildcat). Two sites recorded pine marten, both in Inverness-shire, where populations are small but may be locally common. In these areas, pine marten are known to sometimes den in buildings, probably because natural dens are scarce, and may be found, for example, in attics or chimneys.

Not including records of bats, 64 sites (one in every eleven) recorded 'Priority' species, those SoCCs for which action plans have been developed to organise conservation efforts. These Priority species were: red squirrel, hazel dormouse, water vole, otter and brown hare. Six species of bats are also Priority species, including the common pipistrelle, the most abundant British bat.

Chinese water deer were recorded in the survey for the first time this year and though a non-native species (introduced in the 1870s to London Zoo and later to Woburn and Whipsnade, most of the current population are descended from escapees) and not on the SoCC list, the small UK population is internationally important. There are estimated to be between 1,000 and 2,000 individuals, making up around ten percent of the worldwide population, and in their native range, along the Yangtze River, the deer are increasingly threatened. In Britain, the population has doubled its range since 1969 and is probably growing in number.

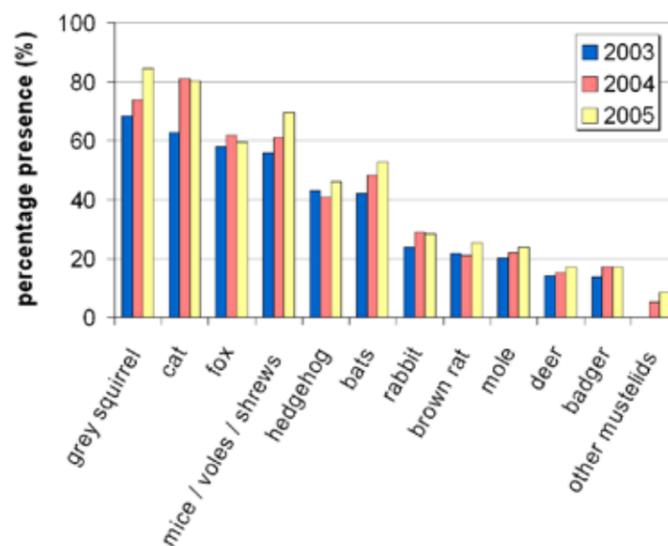


Figure 2 The percentage of sites at which particular species were recorded in the three years of the survey to date.

Biodiversity on our doorstep

At the moment, urban habitats do not have a national action plan as part of the UK BAP but a number of local action plans recognise their importance to biodiversity. They can provide corridors between pockets of habitats that would otherwise be too small to support wildlife and can connect with areas of semi-natural habitat on the fringes of towns. Moreover, the link with wildlife that these habitats offer is increasingly recognised as part of our environmental wellbeing.

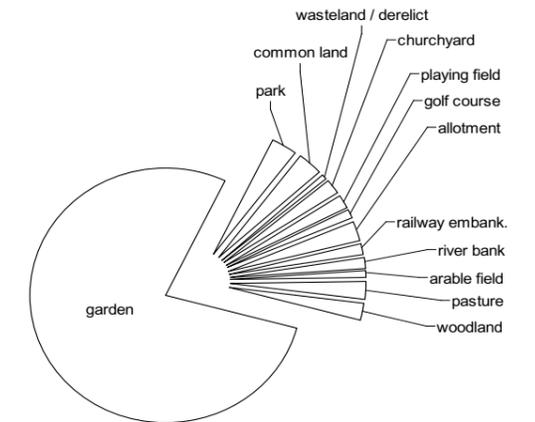


Figure 3 Thirteen categories of sites were surveyed in 2005. Non-garden sites made-up 21% of sites, with parks and commons making-up 3% of the total each.

An important feature of the built environment is the diversity of habitats that are found within sites and across the urban landscape. This was reflected in the range of sites surveyed, from railway embankments to farmland, golf courses to wasteland (Figure 3). Three new categories were added this year to better describe rural sites; these were 'woodland', 'pasture' and 'arable field'. When the average number of wild species for each category of site was looked at, these sites, not unexpectedly, had among the highest values (Figure 4). In previous years, it was found that sites within 100 m of either woodland or pasture tended to have significantly more species.

Gardens, which made-up four fifths of survey sites, were home on average to just over four wild mammal species while river banks, commons and golf courses had more. When comparing sites in this way though, it has to be remembered that not all types of sites were observed for similar periods during the day and night. Churchyards, playing fields and railway embankments for example were

surveyed comparatively little at dusk and at night when many mammals are most active. The time of day also influences which particular species are spotted. Grey squirrel for example were most likely to be seen during the day, while bats and hedgehog were spotted most frequently at night.

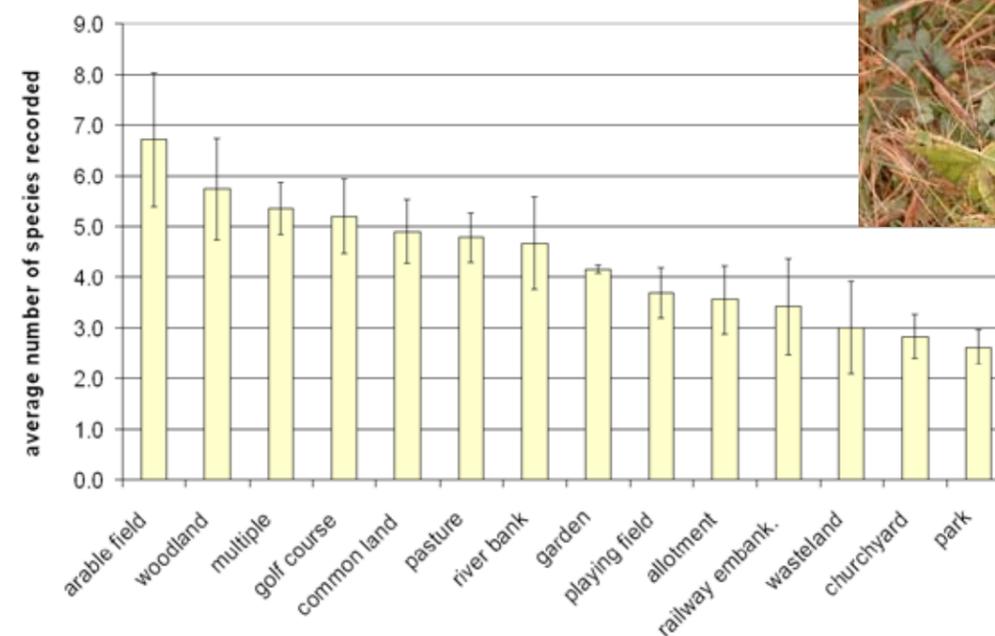


Figure 4 The average number of wild mammal species recorded at each type of site. The verticle line on the top of each bar indicates the spread of the values in each category.



Water shrew: Dave Shaw



Wood mouse: Vera Rhodes